

Message Text

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TAGS: ELAB, FR
SUBJECT: THE FRENCH LABOR SCENE: THE VACATION CALM

REF: A) 22288, B) 19566, C) 19373

1. SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH AN AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER'S STRIKE THREATENS TO DISTURB AUGUST'S TOURIST FLOW, THE FRENCH LABOR SCENE GENERALLY IS QUIET AND IS LIKELY TO REMAIN SO UNTIL SEPTEMBER, WHEN THE GOVERNMENT, UNIONS AND BUSINESS WILL RESUME THEIR VERY MUCH UNFINISHED BUSINESS. END SUMMARY.

2. AS FRANCE SETTLES DEEPER INTO ITS VACATION PERIOD, THE THREAT OF MAJOR LABOR UNREST GROWS INCREASINGLY MORE REMOTE (SEE REFS). SPORADIC EPISODES, SUCH AS A SPREADING AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS STRIKE, MAY DISRUPT THE TOURIST FLOW BUT THE GENERAL SITUATION IS QUIET AND GROWING QUIETER. THE PRESENT CALM, HOWEVER, REFLECTS A DORMANT RATHER THAN A SETTLED SOCIAL SCENE.

3. JUDGING FROM THE PRESS REPORTS, ONE MIGHT THINK THAT THE RECENT AGREEMENT SIGNED BY ALL THE UNIONS,
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INCLUDING THE CGT, AND THE EMPLOYERS IN THE METAL TRADES, WAS A MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH TOWARDS LABOR PEACE. A CLOSER LOOK, HOWEVER, SHOWS THAT THE AGREEMENT (WHICH ACCEPTS THE IDEA OF A MINIMUM GUARANTEED ANNUAL WAGE) IS REALLY AN AGREEMENT TO NEGOTIATE FURTHER THIS FALL. THE MINIMUM IS TO BE FIXED REGIONALLY, NOT NATIONALLY, BY MEANS OF 92 SEPARATE

NEGOTIATIONS. THE AGREEMENT, HOWEVER, IS NONETHELESS A TACTICAL VICTORY FOR ALL THOSE FORCES WHO WISH TO MAINTAIN AT LEAST THE IMAGE OF PROGRESS IN THE "SOCIAL OPENING".

4. NATURALLY, IF THE SUPPORTERS OF THAT OPENING HAVE BEEN MAKING THE MOST OF THEIR SUCCESSES, ITS ENEMIES, MOST NOTABLY THE CGT, HAVE BEEN MAKING SNEERING ASIDES. THE CGT'S DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY KRASUCKI HAS BEEN PUBLICLY DISCOUNTING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ALL PROGRESS TO DATE, AND RENEWING THE CALL ON THE CFDT TO RETURN TO UNITY OF ACTION WITH HIS ORGANIZATION. AT THIS POINT, HOWEVER, THE CGT LEADERSHIP IS PLAYING FROM A RELATIVELY WEAK HAND. IT HAD TO SIGN THE METALS AGREEMENT, ALBEIT BEGRUDGINGLY, OR STAND ISOLATED; IT IS PREPARING FOR A NOVEMBER CONGRESS AT WHICH IT WILL HAVE TO DEAL WITH RANK AND FILE REACTION TO ITS PRO-PCF ELECTIONEERING; AND IT IS CLEARLY TRYING, IN CONNECTION WITH A FURTHER BID TO GET INTO THE EUROPEAN TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION, TO PROJECT AN IMAGE OF RESPONSIBLE TRADE-UNIONISM.

5. IN BRIEF, THEN, THE BIG NEGOTIATIONS ARE STILL TO COME, AND A GREAT DEAL OF UNCERTAINTY EXISTS AS TO THEIR OUTCOME. (CAN AND WILL THE REGIONAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EMPLOYERS OFFER ENOUGH IN THE METALS INDUSTRY TO SATISFY THE CFDT?) THERE IS, MOREOVER, NO REASON TO THINK THAT WHAT THE UNIONS AND EMPLOYERS DO WILL NECESSARILY GUARANTEE LABOR PEACE THIS FALL. THE JUNE STRIKES, BY AND LARGE, WERE GRASSROOT AFFAIRS; AND THERE IS NO REASON TO BELIEVE THEY CANNOT AND WILL NOT BE REPEATED.
HARTMAN

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